

La Conversación Valiosa

Throughout the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters Camille Miller, President/CEO of THI has been serving as a preceptor for Sandra I. Tovar, MSN, APRN, PPCNP-BC, AE-C and Andrya Rivera-Burciaga, MSN, APRN, FNP-BC, two nurses from McAllen, Texas pursuing a Doctoral of Nursing Practice (DNP) Degree from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston.

Focusing on the DNP Essentials and utilizing tools developed by THI and others, the students have engaged in an initiative directed at *end-of-life care*. Their goal is to develop skills and strategies to influence health care policy to meet current and future needs of the Rio Grande Valley community in pediatric and adult populations. The DNP students have utilized theoretical concepts and tools to assist them in the process and evaluation of the initiative.

Toward this end the pair have brought together a group of stakeholders from throughout the community to serve in an advisory capacity as they develop their plans to create a meaningful initiative that will have broad impact on the population of this border community. End-of-life conversations and the development of Advanced Directives are challenged by a number of mitigating economic, social and cultural circumstances in the Valley. Together with their stakeholders Sandra and Andrya are embarking on an initiative that will bring better understanding not only to the Valley's populace but also to area practitioners who seldom have the opportunity to train in this area, and which is often thought of as the exclusive domain of faith based institutions.

Tovar and Buricaga initiated conversations with the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) College of Health Affairs to explore the opportunities of performing a study of students in health related fields in regard to advance planning. There are over 6,000 students at UTRGV in health related fields. The survey results will help obtain funding for a pilot study to identify a need for curriculum development in health related fields on end of life issues in this region. An IRB application was completed to allow the pair to do the study. Sandra and Andrya's objectives include contributing the shared knowledge of data collection and research findings for publication.


The team has not limited themselves to clinical practice or academics in their approach to this fellowship, they are equally focused in the policy implications of this work. In preparation for National Health Decision Day which aims to help people across the U.S. understand the value of advance healthcare planning the duo has secured proclamations from the cities of Edinburg and McAllen, Texas and will also travel to Austin on the 16th of April to participate in the reading of proclamations which they initiated in both the House of Representatives and Texas State Senate sponsored by State Representative Bobby Guerra (District 41, McAllen, Tx) and State Senator Juan Hinojosa (District 20, McAllen, Tx). For 2017, NHDD will be a week-long event, from April 16 to 22, 2017.

Sandra and Andrya will convene a culminating Advanced Care Planning Event “*La Conversación Valiosa*” on April 6, 2017 at the Legacy Event Center in Edinburg, Texas. The event is intended as a professional training targeted at Physicians, Nurses, Health Profession Students, Consumers, Clergy and other Health Care Workers. The event will offer free CEU's to Social Workers and feature Health Profession, Legal and Faith Based guest speakers. *La Conversación Valiosa* will highlight the importance of advanced care planning and engaging healthcare providers and patients in expressing their end-of-life wishes and having them honored and respected. Throughout their fellowship Rick Hernandez from THI has participated as a mentor on end-of-life with emphasis on use of the "Gift of Grace" game to initiate conversations. The game which is now called HELLO will be played as part of the April 6th event.

Sandra and Andrya will achieve their PhD in May when they graduate. It is their intent to continue this work and ensure that the people of the Valley receive all the benefits inherent in advance care planning.

THI is proud to have been engaged with these two remarkable students over the last two semesters and wishes them the best of luck as they take what they've learned from theory to practice. We trust that they are fully prepared to pursue their goals and thank them for the opportunity to engage and learn from such deserving individuals.



Sandra I. Tovar & Andrya Rivera-Burciaga with the  Mayor & City Council



Andrya Burciaga, McAllen City Commissioner John Ingram and Sandra Tovar